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TO: D - Mr. Christopher
C - Mr. Nimetz

FROM: INR - William G. Bowdler WGB

The Coup in Afghanistan

In connection with your appearance tomorrow before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, we have prepared the following assessment of the implications of the Afghan coup.

The New Government

The coup and its aftermath have not yet yielded enough information to give us a firm picture of the new regime. Members of the Khalq Party (a pro-Soviet Communist party) have assumed nearly all the cabinet positions, including the leadership of the ruling National Military Revolutionary Council (NMRC), but the military is actually in charge, according to clandestine reporting.

It is too early to determine the policies of the Khalq Party government. For 15 years the party has concentrated on advancing the cause of Pushtun irredentism: the idea of a separate state for Pushtuns at Pakistan's expense. The Khalq leadership repeatedly accused the Daoud regime of failing to pay enough attention to the issue.

Likely Pakistani and Iranian Reactions

Islamabad and Tehran have long been worried that the Khalqists in Afghanistan might take over if Daoud left the scene. The shock generated in both countries

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by the coup probably will lead them to crack down on their own leftists to insure domestic stability. To improve their ability to do so, and to ease their concerns about external threats, both governments are likely to press for more military hardware from the US. These actions will raise difficult military and human rights issues and questions about defense expenditures and resource allocation.

The Shah has described the Khalq Party coup as part of Moscow's "grand design" for encircling Iran. He noted that he had warned Presidents Nixon, Ford, and Carter of this threat. Although his armed forces have been building a capability to intervene militarily in Afghanistan for several years, the process has not been completed. With the apparent collapse of resistance within Afghanistan, we doubt that Iran will intervene. Our Defense Attache in Tehran, moreover, reports no indication of increased alert status.

Islamabad has for years worked to break the links between the Afghan Communists and Pushtun nationalists in the bordering tribal areas of Pakistan and will be particularly apprehensive that the new regime will embark on an irredentist policy. Internally, General Zia is likely to abandon his plans to form a "national government" (which would include frontier tribal leaders) and to deal sternly with Bhutto and his leftist supporters. Assuming that other countries soon recognize the Khalqist government (Soviet Union, India, Cuba, and Bulgaria have already done so), Islamabad will probably follow suit in the hope of influencing Kabul to eschew adventuristic policies.

Turkish View

Turkey will be concerned, but Ankara will most likely count on the Shah to deal effectively with the problem at his back door. While Turkey's security is not directly affected by the Afghan coup, the Turks will be apprehensive if either Iran or Pakistan (both allies of Turkey in CENTO) were to take drastic steps against local leftists or against Afghanistan which ultimately could affect their own security.

Soviet Attitude

The Soviets appear to be helping the new regime to consolidate its position. They were the first to recognize. They [illegible] the Khalqists have little

fundamental domestic support. They will be concerned that, in the short term, the naming of Communists to top positions could galvanize local opposition by inviting meddling by Pakistan and Iran, and even by China. The Soviets will also be interested in securing greater influence with the new regime in order to restrain it from adventurism that might upset the stability of the region.

Peking's Perspective

The Chinese, who share a short common border with Afghanistan, will not be happy over the coup by a party with known Moscow leanings. So far, however, other than straight news reports repeating Western wire service material, there has been no public commentary from Peking.

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